



A SERMON,

PREACHED IN ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, KINGSTON,

THE

26TH SEPTEMBER, 1841,

ON

THE DEATH OF LORD SYDENHAM.

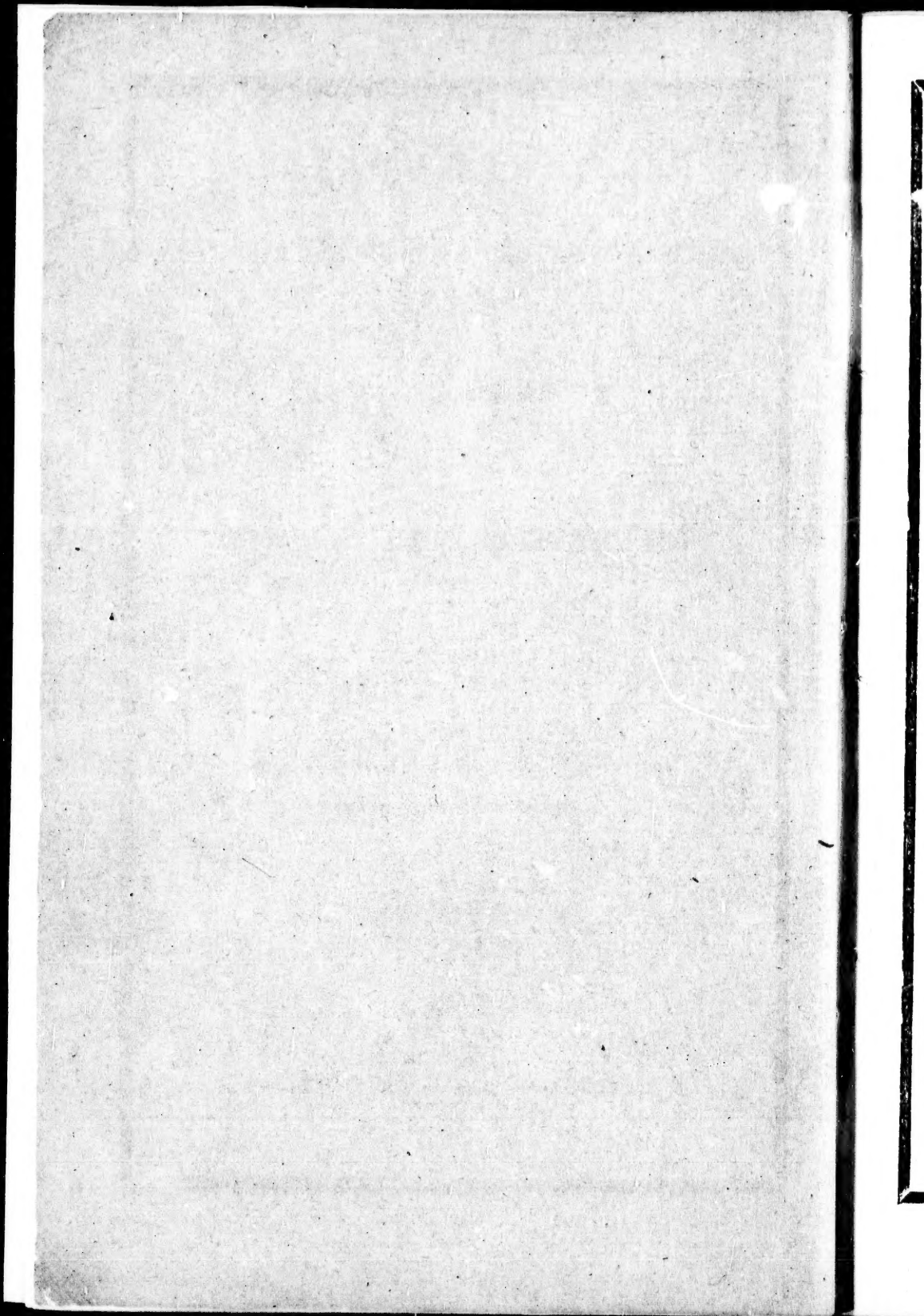
BY THE REV. W. AGAR ADAMSON, A.B.,

CHAPLAIN TO HIS EXCELLENCY.

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ARMOUR & RAMSAY, ST. PAUL STREET.

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Henry Adair
June
1842

THIS Sermon is given to the public at the pressing instance of many friends of Lord Sydenham.

The Preacher cannot send it to the press without stating it to be—except in what relates to the last hours of His Excellency—a mere compilation, the whole having been hastily thrown together, in a manner utterly unworthy of the subject, and of the occasion.

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A SERMON. &c.

"For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great."

25th Psalm, 11th Verse.

AFFLICTION springeth not out of the ground, neither doth it come by the chance of a blind fate : it is the merciful messenger of Him whose name and essence is **love**, to teach us **our true state**, and to lead us, if we will be led, to our most lasting **interests**. And still it is strange, that while grief and calamity abound so in the world, thoughtlessness and carelessness should be almost as prevalent.

Take up the history of life where you will, ask "**Whose image and superscription is this?**" The answer is, "**Suffering, suffering.**" In this life nothing is certain, but that we **must suffer**, and we **must die**. And yet, what is the reason that when we, under the commission of heaven, or from the impulse of our own feelings and conscience, urge you to prepare for death—to relinquish **this world** for the **next**, our cry is utterly ineffectual? When we call on you to resign the handful of dust you are grasping with such miserable tenacity, what is the result? You stop your ears, and grasp it still closer. Wherefore is this? It is because the subject, though the most awful on which one human being can address another is, universally, the most neglected—shunned in silence—or trifled with in talk—or shut up in a secret recess of the soul, like **Paul in Felix's prison**, to be examined at a "**more convenient season**"—a season that never arrives.

It is too common to excite interest. A sermon on death is like a funeral passing through our streets : we pause to mark the **trap-pings**, but we think not of the **corse** beneath.

The subject is so worn out by perpetual recurrence, or by exhausted sensibility, or artificial insensibility in those who hear, that

we may speak on for ever without the hope that what we say gives one thought to the mind, one sting to the conscience, one feeling to the heart.

And yet that subject is **Death** : almost the only idea that all men have in common ; certainly, the only idea that all men seem determined to exclude.

God, his inspired word, the course of nature, the events of human existence, all seem, if I may dare to say so, sworn together to force it on our minds. Yet we stop our ears and harden our hearts, as if—fools and blind that we are—forgetting we are to die, could make us immortal.

Reflection teaches these awful lessons to a few, and well for those who are taught by reflection—if we refuse her, we shall have a sterner teacher,—**experience**.

But it is not the lesson we so much need to know,—**we know it**, though we are callous to it—it is its application we require, we want something to bring it to our hearts by a terrible, a penetrating, an afflicting dispensation ; something that will force open the eyes which we resolutely close, that will make the ear tingle which we stop, that will sink into the heart which we harden in vain against its power. Such has not been wanted.

We have, within the last few awful days, been taught what death is in all its awful terrors, in all its anguish, in all its bitterness of present evil, in all its overwhelming and incalculable consequences of future danger and calamity. The destroying Angel bore a two edged weapon, as subtle as it was potent, fine enough to divide the most exquisite ligaments, strong enough to burst the mightiest bonds—one edge severed the ties of domestic friendship—the other smote to the dust the hopes of this immense country.

Myriads die every day, myriads are dying at this hour and of multitudes of them, it must be allowed, that those who wish them best, who perhaps love them most, have reason to wish them dead, before they die. The old, the very aged, die after they have survived their hopes, their views, their children, their senses, and themselves, after there is nothing left in the world to which they can aspire but a grave.

The afflicted die, and their death is an end of suffering, the diseased perish, and their dissolution is an end of pain. All this

constant lesson of daily mortality we receive without instruction,—the event is ordinary,—often welcome—we see them pass away, and forget we are to follow them. Some tears, but they are rather the tears of recollection than of conviction, are dropped on the graves of the dead ; instead of sinking into our own hearts, from whatever source they are drawn, we dry them soon, we turn away our eyes from the handwriting on the wall and rush back to the banquet, readily persuaded that the summons was intended for our companions not for us.

But, the human heart is not always suffered to slumber in security, its slumber is sometimes broken by a voice that will be heard ; a hand commissioned by Heaven rends open our curtains and a terrible light flashes on the eyes of the dreamer through the opening.

If imagination were tasked to devise an event that united the extremes of corporeal suffering and national calamity, that combined all the anguish of mortality, with the more tremendous impressions of eternity, imagination itself would faint under the burthen of conceiving a portion of that evil which bows us down before God in grief, in terror, and I trust in repentance this day.

The image of a young and wealthy and intellectual English Nobleman, bound to existence by so many delightful ties, the honoured of his country, the favored of his Sovereign sacrificing health, enjoyment, and life itself in the service of this our country, requires scarce an additional feature to interest every man for his welfare—add, that the hearts of thousands are knit to him as the heart of one man, that the hearts of those who differ most widely from his policy, honor his integrity and throb for his safety, that the hopes and prospects of peace for this vast Province are centered in him, that England, and England's Sovereign, and ours, look anxiously to his wisdom to guide us through the ocean of perils by which we are surrounded, and surely our knees would be instantly and eagerly bent in supplication for the preservation of his life.

Such prayers doubtless have been put up by many, without the parade of affected feeling or exaggerated devotion—they have been answered, but not as the suppliants expected. He is no more—he lies there cold and inanimate. The eloquent tongue is silent—the master-mind is at rest,—the warm heart has ceased to beat.

He has been smitten in the accumulated enjoyment of youth, wealth, eminence, honor and success.

No event of greater horror and anguish ever desolated the annals of this Province, no event of similar importance has left its awful track upon the page of its history. But from history we turn at this moment with disgust : at such a moment as this, we seek, like Joseph, a place where we may weep, and go to our chambers and weep there. This is a case in which even Man weeps ; and no one can chide his tears, and no one can dry them.

Perhaps there is no place from which the awful lessons of this event should sink into our hearts with more force and weight than that from which I address you. Our business here is not to praise man, nor any child of man : our business here is not "to soothe the dull cold ear of death with flattery" ; not to tell you of time—but of eternity. Yet, as eternity, in this wretched, perishable existence, must often borrow its subjects from time, I demand, had we ever such a topic to urge you on, so full of grief, so full of instruction ? Never : kingdoms have passed away, and they have left no impression behind them on earth ; their rulers are gone, and have left little but the frightful traces of their crimes. The mighty of the earth are gone—the conquerors are departed—"the proud are robb'd and have slept." Who mourned for them ? Tears were shed for them indeed ; but they were shed by the widows and orphans whom their swords had made. But *he* is mourned by the tears of those, from whose eyes he never drew a tear, but the bitter one that drops upon his grave.

All panegyric is idle and profane. His best eulogy is that burst of sorrow that answers me at this moment—that awful murmur of involuntary grief which at this moment is echoing through this vast continent.

But he "being dead yet speaketh," and through me calls upon you solemnly to consider the words of our text, which were amongst the last he uttered—"Pardon, O Lord, mine iniquity, for it is great."

His attention had been directed to the 25th Psalm, from whence these words are taken. He appreciated its beauties, and felt its consolation. Again and again he repeated from it the cries of David,

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when under affliction similar to his own :—" Shew me thy ways, **O Lord**, teach me thy paths ; lead me in thy truth, and teach me, " for thou art the God of my salvation " ; " Remember not the sins of " my youth, nor my transgressions ; according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness sake, **O Lord** " ; " Send thee " unto me, and have mercy upon me, for I am desolate and afflicted ; " look upon my affliction and forgive all my sins." But especially, and above all, did he cling to, and urge the humble prayer of the Royal Psalmist—" For thy name's sake, **O Lord**, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." He saw that Adam's single sin of disobedience, by which man fell, was great ; that it insulted God, denied his truth, defied his authority. He saw that the Patriarchs and the Prophets had reason to join with the Psalmist in acknowledging, that for the same reason their " iniquity was great " ; and that professing, sinning Christians have much more reason, with their hands on their mouths, and their mouths in the dust, to acknowledge this deeply-humiliating truth.

And this indeed is the first effect which is produced by the Holy Spirit of God upon the heart : it shews a man that not only in his habits, but in each act of sin, his iniquity is great.

When a man thinks his culpability small, it is not only a great error, but it makes him careless and indifferent upon the great subject of reconciliation with God. But when a man sees sin, and sees his own sin, in all its just hideousness of proportion, then indeed will he cry out for pardon : it is the very thing that will give life to all his prayers, urgency and earnestness to all his cries.

Thousands have believed, and thousands have hoped, and some of you may even now be believing and hoping, that you shall find pardon and acceptance at the bar of God's tribunal, because you are not so bad as others—because you have in your own mind never done any thing so iniquitous as to deserve God's wrath, and damnation for ever.

But when led by the Spirit and the word of God to feel, that your " iniquity is great," this hope must vanish like the morning mist,—must utterly fall, and be annihilated like the " baseless fabric of a vision," and your plea for pardon must be looked for, where he

whom we have loved and lost, looked for, and we trust found it :
 " For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great."

It is in God's own nature, which is love—God's own work, redemption—God's own name, Christ Jesus the Lord,—that the sinner can find any plea for acceptance in the hour of death, or in the day of judgment. He feels that " in his flesh dwells no good thing : " that he has sinned and come short of the glory of God, and if justified, " must be justified freely by God's grace." " Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, God saveth us."

And, friends, if a scriptural view of man's state, as having greatly offended, must prevent the Christian from coming before God, trusting in his own righteousness, from finding in himself any plea on which to ground his hope for salvation, or his request for mercy, blessed be God ! he finds in the same scripture, a plea which opens to him a wider door of hope—a surer anchor of the soul, and gives strong consolation to those who, in a sense of their great iniquity, fly for refuge to that hope which is set before them.

If in the Scriptures of the Old Testament he finds King David humbled under a sense of his great iniquity, seeking pardon from God, for God's own "name sake," he finds those same scriptures pointing out in terms of increasing clearness, that channel which, in regard to his own name, he provides for the conveyance of his pardon and grace. He finds the Prophet predicting the coming of a most mysterious and wonderful person who should "bear our griefs, and carry away our sorrows"—upon whom should be laid "the iniquities of us all, by whose stripes we should be healed, and "who should justify many, for he would bear their iniquities."

He finds in the New Testament all these truths put forward more explicitly and more clearly. He finds the same declaration with regard to man's ruin, the same humbling views, utterly excluding him from any share in his own justification, " That by the deeds of the law shall no man be justified, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

He compares his life and conduct with the demands of God's holy law, and finds indeed his iniquities to be great—that "every mouth must be stopped, and all men become guilty before God."

He then finds Him of whom the law and the Prophets did write, Gods own Son revealed in human flesh—named by the spirit of truth Jesus, because “he should save his people from their sins.” He finds him “set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins.” And he hears the inspired Apostle, speaking of that Jesus, say, “that through him is “preached unto us forgiveness of sins, and by Him those that believe “are justified from all things.”

If then the contrite believer under the old dispensation, might, when he saw the greatness of his sin—when the sight of that greatness made him feel his need of forgiveness, cry out, “For thy names “sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great,” much more may the humbled soul under the Christian dispensation, when a deep but just sense of his sin drives him to ask for mercy, say, “for the sake of Emmanuel, pardon mine iniquity for it is great.”

Much more is he relieved from all despair when he knows that “the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.” That though his sins may be as scarlet, that blood washes them white as snow.

Here, it may be asked, what is my object at present in turning your eyes to the way appointed for the pardon of iniquity—and to the consolation which was derived from it by Him, for whom we sorrow, in the hour of his death ?

Is it to encourage any in security, in sin, or in carelessness ? Is it to induce you to defer repentance and reformation ? to postpone your cry for mercy till disease or death assail you ? Is it to lead you to “continue in sin, that grace may abound ?”

No my friends, but it is, that by pointing out to you the true light which is held forth to a benighted world in the Gospel of Christ, I may, with Gods blessing, lead you to turn now towards *that hope* and live.

When men know nothing but the Law, and the hope of keeping the law as the road to Salvation, they can have no inducement, for they can have no hope from acknowledging the depth of their offences, and the greatness of their sin. They can have no hope from law human or divine, but that they can plead, “not guilty”—this may succeed before a human bar—the transgressor may escape when tried before the judgment seat of man, but all things

are open and naked to the eyes of Him, with whom we have to do—no other witness but his all seeing eye, is requisite to convict the guilty before his tribunal.

Our God can, and does address to us all, what he addressed to each of the seven Churches of Asia—"I know thy works." Therefore if we say we are innocent, God will enter into judgment with us, "and in his sight shall no man living be justified." "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

This, I can testify, was in the trying hour of his agony, in the bitter hour of nature's trial, the hope and confidence of Him whom so many thousand hearts this day weep for.

It is difficult and delicate to speak of those whose superior station veils them from common view—it is tremendous to speak of those whom the hand of God hath snatched from mortal sight for ever. It is with an humble and trembling touch we should dare to approach the veil of futurity—yet some gleams of light break through it to cheer and to direct us. Let us remember that this illustrious person, amidst anguish unspeakable—amidst agony unutterable, could say, on the announcement that all his earthly hopes were about to have an end. "God's will be done"—and then cry with devoted sincerity "for thy name's sake, Oh Lord, pardon mine iniquity for it is great."

My brethren, we may soon be called to undergo a trial like his, Oh ! let us pray for his resignation and his hope !

It is impossible that the first instructions we take from calamity should be taken, or given in a collected, coherent manner—the event—the terrible event is rushing on our souls at every moment, and defeating by the force of its recollection, the utility of those lessons its recollection should teach.

It is awful to see death in all his might—blasting manhood, and withering life, and severing the ties of the heart, and trampling on all human power, and defying all human skill, and crushing all at a blow into the cold and narrow tomb, and writing on it with his dart—"Mortals, such is the will of my Master and of yours."

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Oh, one such fact preaches more than many sermons—it preaches to the soul of man, within him. May it preach powerfully to yours.

Let us retire to commune with our own hearts, in our chambers ; and if we have hearts, the power of God will be there to touch, to elevate, and to purify them.

Tears it is impossible for us to withhold, but let this tremendous dispensation not make us weep merely ; let it also make us think—think, and be the better for reflection—weep, and be the happier for our tears.

We cannot benefit by that life which promised happiness to millions. We may, oh we must benefit by his death—he must not have died in vain. His exalted rank few can aspire to—his intellectual power still fewer ; but his integrity of purpose—his love of Canada, his loyalty to his Sovereign, his universal benevolence, we all can emulate.

Let us pray, and let us each individually endeavour, that his death in the service of this country, for whose welfare he literally died a Martyr, may be hallowed to its good ; that over his untimely grave past differences may be forgotten, a spirit of charity and benevolence spring up and be diffused through the land, and all men of all parties, unite cordially in obedience to the laws, which his master-mind devised—that all may work together for peace and good to this heretofore distracted country.

He is gone—while he is ascending may we catch his mantle and feel the inspiration. He is gone before Him who can a thousand fold recompense the loss of life and power, even with that crown which has no thorns, with those pleasures which know neither diminution nor end. He is gone before Him, to whom the kingdoms of the earth are as the dust of the balance, and its enjoyments as the bubble on the stream, for with him is “ an inheritance incorruptible,” at “ his right hand are pleasures for evermore.”

Beloved friends shall we not seek to be there ? At this moment under the lesson of this tremendous dispensation, do we not feel at the very bottom of our chastised and sorrowing hearts, the vanity, the hollowness, the nothingness of life ?

“ Eternity—eternity” seems to be in the very echo of that blow, which has smitten us to the dust.

Oh then my brethren, to God and to eternity let us turn. All things, and grief above all, conspire to lead us to Him. Approach Him then, through Him, who is the "way, the truth, and the life," seek a living interest in the Lord Jesus, walk by the faith of the Son of God, and in the humble, world-resigning spirit of his Gospel.

He whom we deplore—whom perhaps our latest posterity shall deplore, resigned himself without a murmur to the will of Heaven.

Let us cast our mite into the treasury of resignation. Let us offer up our souls and bodies a lively sacrifice to God—it is our reasonable service. Let us resign to Him our hearts and our lives, and he will not reject them. He will in no wise cast us out.

So shall this afflictive dispensation be sanctified to us—so shall it be "good for us that we have been in trouble." So shall we prove the truth of the Apostle's declaration, that "All things shall work together for good, to them that love God."

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